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Review of Hannah Joyner, *From Pity to Pride: Growing up Deaf in the Old South*

Mark J. Stern

University of Pennsylvania, stern@sp2.upenn.edu

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Comments

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Trenton to ferret out the facts. Bright, earnest, and indefatigable, she becomes Scull's tragic heroine. Against fierce resistance, Greenacre uncovered exactly what had happened to patients, and how devastating the clinical results had been. Her meticulous report confirmed Cotton's exorbitant death rate and deflated his claims of cures. Yet Meyer, unwilling to see his prominent disciple besmirched, quashed her document. Greenacre's personal and professional life never recovered. Eventually, although Cotton was eased out of his executive position, he died in 1933 with his reputation largely intact, thanks to his profession's code of silence.

Scull's subject, here as in his previous work, is psychiatry and its discontents. Accordingly, he locates Cotton within a cavalcade of misguided innovators whose cures for madness were worse than the disease. More broadly, though, *Madhouse* is a cautionary tale that applies all too well to medicine and surgery. One recent example: in May 2005, the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) published a comprehensive study of episiotomy (surgical resection of the perineum—the skin between the vaginal opening and the anus). Obstetricians use this procedure in at least one-third of vaginal births in America, ostensibly to help their patents. But the AHRQ could find no evidence of clinical benefit, and much evidence of harms to women, from infection to incontinence. Evidently the youngest science still has a long way to go.

California Healthcare Institute

David Gollaher

From Pity to Pride: Growing Up Deaf in the Old South. By Hannah Joyner (Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2004. xii + 210 pp. \$49.95).

Over the past generation, a major task of social history has been to tell the stories of groups that had historically been silent. Certainly, no group better fits this definition than Deaf persons. Not only have Deaf members of the popular classes been excluded from history, but even members of social elites who were hearing impaired have found it difficult to have their experience included in history.

From Pity to Pride represents an important contribution to overcoming this barrier. Hannah Joyner chooses to focus on the experience of a narrow band of Deaf persons—members of white Southern elites before the Civil War—as a means of tracing out some of the common themes in the life experience of Deaf Americans.

Certainly few books begin with such a jolt. The acknowledgement begins: "In February of 1993, I had surgery for a non-cancerous brain tumor. During the surgery my acoustic-vestibular nerve was cut. I lost hearing in one ear and my balance was impaired." Joyner goes on to explain that in the wake of these experiences, her past interest in the history of 'discrimination and resistance' became linked to the history of Deaf persons. This interest was encouraged by a stint on the faculty of Gallaudet University, a college designed for Deaf students.

Her health experience and immersion in Deaf culture at Gallaudet gives *From Pity to Pride* its distinctive voice. On the one hand, Ms. Joyner views the history of Deaf Southerners through the lens of contemporary views of Deaf culture—especially its distinctive means of communication and social interactions. On the other hand, the book grows out of her interest unearthing sources that would allow her to tell a broad story of the development of that distinctive culture.

Yet, barriers exist. As the author points out in her Note on Sources, there are a number of problems that prevent this history from being written. Most obviously, many Deaf Americans never were able to write their own stories. Even where documentary evidence exists, archives' classification systems often conceal relevant material. What sources there are on Deaf persons is often written by hearing people. In short, the distinctive Deaf culture that contemporary social scientists have been able to document appears—at the moment—to be unreachable by historians.

Frustrated in this broader goal, Ms. Joyner has turned to a more focused purpose, examining how the distinctive culture of the antebellum South influenced how hearing people viewed Deaf people and describing the social and institutional world within which Deaf Southerners lived. The book is organized about the intersection of a set of individuals and a set of themes that are roughly organized chronologically. The efforts of one John Washington—as reported in an 1841 medical journal—to cure his deafness is used as a means of exploring the medical profession's stance on the problem. The Tillinghurst family of North Carolina provides an opportunity to explore the difficult choices families faced in deciding how to address Deaf children's condition. Jefferson Trist's school career is used as a means of exploring the range of educational opportunities open to Deaf students.

Layered over these individual biographies is the distinctive role of the South in influencing life experience. Most clearly, the color line assured that the story of Deaf whites and Deaf African Americans would never cross. Joyner suggests as well that the world the slaveholders made included a 'culture of paternalism and dependency in the South [that] codified a rigid system of oppression and hierarchy that left little room for self-determination for Deaf southerners.' (p.6) Perhaps the clearest indication of this culture was the dominance of 'pity' as the dominant Southern reaction to deafness and opposition to reform impulses in the South because of their association with abolitionism. Although Joyner makes a plausible argument that this is the case, the absence of systematic material on the North makes it difficult to assess this line of argument.

Finally, Joyner uses the story of one John Jacob Flournoy to make the point that even in the 19th century, Deaf Americans were able to take a defiant stance with respect to hearing society. Although Flournoy's life history included time in institutions for the Deaf and 'insane asylums,' it also included efforts to sell a cure for the common cold, to be appointed 'ambassador' to the Mormons, and to advocate for a variety of causes including the expulsion of all African Americans, the establishment of a white colony for Deaf Americans in the West, and the moral superiority of 'trigamy'—each man having three wives. Certainly, Mr. Flournoy was not about to sit around and be pitied.

One comes away from this book with a glimpse of the unique institutional, cultural, and behavioral world in which Deaf southerners lived, and a first inkling

of how those elements could give rise to a distinctive culture. This is no small accomplishment. *From Pity to Pride* is a foundational work to which future historians of Deaf Americans will look for inspiration and insight.

University of Pennsylvania

Mark Stern

Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past. By William Deverell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. xix + 330 \$29.95 cloth).

In *Whitewashed Adobe*, William Deverell details the ways in which city leaders and city builders "whitewashed" Los Angeles's early history and created a new regional identity that all but erased Mexican history and peoples from the landscape. Unlike Carey McWilliams's critique of southern California's fascination with a Spanish 'fantasy heritage,' Deverell reveals that the manipulation of Los Angeles's Mexican past was far reaching, extending to "arenas of work, landscape and environment, cultural production, city building, and public health emergency" (251). As Deverell demonstrates, the whitewashing of Los Angeles's cultural and ethnic history had been completed by World War Two.

Whitewashed Adobe is a cultural and ethnic history of Los Angeles but is not necessarily about Mexicans, as Deverell admits. Rather, it is about the politically, economically, and culturally powerful "Anglo" men who transformed Los Angeles from a largely Spanish-speaking, agrarian *pueblo* to an industrialized, "modern" city with white, middle class, Protestant sensibilities. *Whitewashed Adobe*'s six chapters are largely dedicated to tracing how these men "appropriated, absorbed, and occasionally obliterated" (7) Mexican history and spaces in carrying out their vision for Los Angeles. The first chapter examines the unrelenting ethnic and racial violence that took place in the wake of the American conquest. Within thirty years or so, ethnic relations had calmed and Mexicans had been quickly outnumbered (as well as politically disenfranchised and economically marginalized), as the second chapter reveals. These conditions, Deverell argues, allowed for the development of *La Fiesta de Los Angeles*, a carnival-like parade developed by local entrepreneurs to attract white tourists, investors, and settlers. Rather than celebrating the city's multi-racial and multi-ethnic origins, the parade appropriated and recast the region's ethnic history. The third chapter turns its attention to the transformation of the Los Angeles River from stream to flood control channel. In containing and controlling the waterway, which threatened to disrupt urban planning, city leaders erased its link to the Mexican past. This chapter shows that the river not only sustained Spanish-speaking inhabitants and agricultural pursuits but also segregated those peoples along racial and class lines.

Through the use of oral histories and Alejandro Morales's *The Brick People* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1988), chapter four recounts in rich detail labor relations at the Simons brickyard and the modern building of Los Angeles. This chapter shows how ideas about race and labor segmentation relegated Mexi-

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